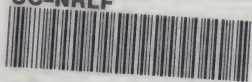


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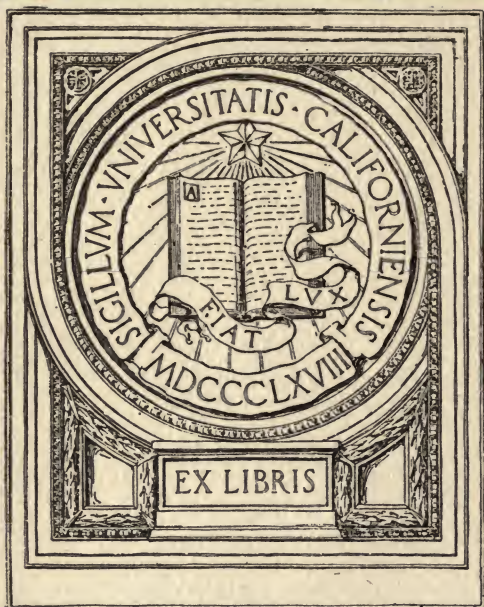
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The Lord of the Harvest:
a Morality in One Act:
by Laurence Housman

Samuel French: Publisher

28-30 West Thirty-eighth Street : New York

LONDON

Samuel French, Ltd.

26 SOUTHAMPTON STREET, STRAND

PRICE TWENTY-FIVE CENTS

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THE LORD OF THE HARVEST.

A MORALITY IN ONE ACT.

CHARACTERS.

GRINDER.....*A Corn-Merchant*
DRUDGE.....*A Journeyman Miller*
DOLE.....*His wife*
BIT and SUP.....*Their children*
DOTTY DAFT.....*A Scavenger*
STRIKE.....*A leader of the people*
HUE and CRY.....*Rioters*
Rioters and Strikers



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THE LORD OF THE HARVEST

SCENE:—*The scene is laid in the ground floor interior of a mill, a low wide chamber, divided by wooden beams and partitions. To the fore is the living room, to the rear the mill with its machinery and flour-bins. The whole of one side is occupied by sacks of corn piled up in rows one above the other, marked with the owner's stamp. Against a partition to the right stands a low wooden bed, hollowed with use and covered by an old patch-work quilt; to the left is a small tressle-table. On the end of the bed sits DOLE, holding her little daughter SUP in her arms; the child lies still and rigid, her face turned from the audience, holding her mother's neck in an upward, strained position. To the left sits DRUDGE, leaning forward on a low stool in an attitude of deep dejection. At his feet lies an old wooden toy, a broken horse on wheels. The boy BIT moves listlessly about the room trying to make play. He stops discouraged, advances timidly, and looking from one to the other waits to attract the attention of his parents. Failing to do so, he lifts his voice and utters a queer little cry of plaintive loneliness. It rises to a note of fretful impatience touched by fear. His mother, her eyes fixed in stony grief, seems not to hear him.*

BIT. Ooh!—Ooh!—Ooh!

DRUDGE. Just you stop it, 'Ush your noise!

BIT. Daddy!

DRUDGE. Don't come o' me. There, take your toys and play with 'em.

BIT. I can't play all alone. I can't play all alone!

DRUDGE. What, have yer grown tired of 'em, then?

BIT. Can't sister play with me?

DOLE. Sister be gone to sleep, you let 'er be.

BIT. No, for 'er eyes be open. Oh, look there, mother, look at 'er face.

DRUDGE. Here! You come 'ere! Sit down yer-self, and don't you never stir, not till I tell yer.

(BIT sits down cowed. A pause. He looks about for something to interest him.)

BIT. Daddy, why ain't the wheels at work to-day?

DRUDGE. There's naught for 'em to grind—you can't make hay when there's no grass, and when there ain't no grain you can't make flour. *(BIT gets up and moves toward the stack of corn sacks)* Here! You sit down again.

BIT. Ain't there no corn? Ain't there no corn, dad, then?

DRUDGE. Corn? Aye, there's corn enough. But the rich men have got it all. They want the price to rise before they sell it. There, before your eyes, that's corn! There's food there, waiting to be ground, weeks it have waited there, and all around. There be mouths starving for it—starving fine.

BIT. Why can't you grind it, dad?

DRUDGE. 'Cos it ain't mine. 'Cos it belongs to one as bought it cheap so as to sell it dear. I'm 'ere to keep it for 'im—keep it till it rots. Grinder, our master, 'olds it. 'E's got lots more on it, too,—aye, more, more, I'll be bound, than 'e can count—mills stacked to roof to ground, storing it up, till selling suits 'is plan! *(To his wife)* See 'ow he trusts me for an honest man,—one as won't rob 'im! Yet

don't 'e rob me? Where be my job? With 'im wait-in' to see 'is price—'is price! Aye, look at 'em, lick yer lips, and feast yer eyes! They ain't fer the likes o' you,—not thought yer dies! They're for the market,—waitin' for it to rise. While flesh and blood go down.

DOLE. God 'elp us all! The dear God 'elp us all!

DRUDGE. That's what they call "A corner o' wheat!" And what do they call we? A dung-'eap—just a dung-'eap.

DOLE. 'Ush, don't be so wild o' tongue! It don't do any good. Cursing your master, that won't bring us food.

DRUDGE. Would y' 'ave me *beg* for it? You be so mild you drive me mad.

DOLE. There, there! Don't scare the child! Can't you be quiet and wait? We can but wait, 'e'll get 'is price some day.

DRUDGE. Ah! sure as fate! 'E'll get 'is price—some day. Aye! We be mud under 'is feet, but 'is price, it be blood! Some day 'e'll get it, and we'll all be dead, paying 'is price—'is price—the price o' bread.

BIT. (*Scared*) Mother, may I go out?

DOLE. Yes, don't you run too far. Come 'ere, and let me look at yer, my son. (*She looks at his thin face pensively*) Ah, you'll do for a while. Be off, and play.

BIT. (*Stops in the door and turns back*) Mother, I want my dinner. Mother, say, ain't there no dinner for us?

DOLE. Don't talk that way. You ain't 'ad breakfast yet! You run and play. (*To her husband*) 'Ere, go and fetch the milk, we'll give 'em that.

DRUDGE. What's the use on it? Oh, we'll get 'em fat on starving goat's milk, won't us? (*He goes and fetches milk from cupboard*) There it be—as thin as water, anyone can see there ain't no goodness

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in it. That's all she gives this morning—less than a pint. How's they to live on that?

DOLE. (*With quiet intention*) There, set it down.

DRUDGE. Yer be so tame.

BIT. Mother, I'm hungry.

DOLE. (*Rises with a sort of inspiration and carrying SUP in her arms*) Come! We'll 'ave a game. Let's play a game. Come along, Bit and Sup, come on, come on. There, pull the table up, and put the chairs round. (*She directs the laying of the table.*

DRUDGE *lends a reluctant hand*, BIT *enters into the game with a pathetic, trustful wonder*. SUP *lies in her mother's arms without motion*) Ah, that's right.

Now, wait, what's to do next? Run on and set a plate for each, aye, and a knife! And put the jug there in the middle. Now, you bring your mug. Sup shall have mine. That's right. Now, dad, you take the end. Here's bread and butter, and that's a cake—and there be apples, and eggs be in the pan a-frying. Now, sit down. (BIT *sits down*. To DRUDGE) Sit ye down, man. (DRUDGE *sits down unwillingly*. To BIT) And say your grace—"For what we're to receive Lord make us thankful. Amen." (DRUDGE *turns away, refusing to join in*.

BIT *begins to play up, seized by the spirit of the game*) Now, you leave poking your fingers in that cake!! You start on bread and butter like a good boy. (To SUP, *tenderly*) What'll you 'ave? Here, darling, turn ye round. And look about yer. Oh, yes, I'll be bound as you'll want something, once you have begun. (*She turns the child upon her knee and presents to the audience a face of utter starvation*) Ah, she be waiting till the eggs be done. (To DRUDGE) 'Ere, pour the milk out. (DRUDGE *pours out milk*) Child, don't eat so quick. (To BIT) You'll choke yourself, then we shall 'ave yer sick.

BIT. But, Mummy, I'm hungry, and the bread be new.

DOLE. Yes, yes, but you must drink a little, too.

BIT. No, Mummy, I don't want no milk—that's real. Daddy milked that this morning. (*A shadow falls over the feast, the make-believe loses its attraction. BIT tries still to keep it up*) Please, may I have some cake?

DOLE. (*To DRUDGE, dispiritedly*) Cut 'im some cake. (*DRUDGE reluctantly makes believe to help BIT to cake, then lays down the knife. DOLE looks at him reproachfully*) Why ain't yer gav' yerself a bit?

DRUDGE. Ah, I can't play your game. I 'aven't the heart for it.

(*BIT lays his head down on the table and begins to cry softly.*)

DOLE. (*To DRUDGE*) Oh, fie on yer! Shame! Look what ye've done now.

BIT. Mother, I can't abide this cake. It makes my mouth like fire inside. Mother, mother—(*He sobs bitterly*)

DOLE. There, there! Take 'im away. Let 'im get down. 'Ush! 'Ush! (*BIT goes and lies on the bed, burying his face in the quilt.* DOLE turns to SUP) What did yer say? What did yer say? (*SUP's lips move but make no sound*) There, 'ave some milk. (*She holds up the mug to SUP's lips. The child slowly drains the milk, and when the mug is set down continues to move her lips as though still drinking*)

DRUDGE. Did 'er speak then?

DOLE. No fear! Speak! Don't you think it! We shan't never 'ear 'er speak again.

(*SUP's face becomes set, a slight convulsion seizes her body.*)

DRUDGE. Lay 'er down, lay 'er down.

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DOLE. I've tried 'er lyin' down. 'Er can't rest so. 'Er cried out "Mother, don't yer let me go." That was the last time. Ah, you let 'er be—she's best left where she is—leave 'er to me. (*The death-struggle begins. SUP gasps for breath*) Put back the table. Ah! Pull out the bed. 'Elp me.

(*The table is put back, the bed drawn forward, SUP is laid on it. DOLE starts chafing her feet. A knocking is heard.*)

DRUDGE. It ain't no use, 'er's dead—'er's dead!

(*Knocking is heard. They lay out the body on the bed. The knocking goes on. Enter DOTTY DAFT.*)

DAFT. Anyone here? What, be ye all so deaf? You sounded dead!

DRUDGE. Oh, there be some still left. (*DOTTY DAFT comes forward. He seems strangely excited. DRUDGE looks at him*) What, have ye news for us? What's brought 'e down?

DAFT. Warm news, my lad, warm news. They've fired the town, aye, it be burning. Rafter and roof and spire. The walls and windows be cracked with fire. And all the barrels of oil and beer and wine be running down the streets, and folk like swine, snout to the trough, be drinking 'emselves dead—Dead-drunk on empty stomachs. And yet—no bread. None! They' can't find it. No, not though they' sacked warehouse on warehouse as they thought was packed. They be all empty.

DRUDGE. Aye, the corn be here—here in the mills. They brought it out for fear, by stealth, lest folk should find it.

DAFT. Out here? Oh! You've got the corn here, have you? Don't you know they'll kill you for it? Out, man, put it out. Out from your doors. There's danger all about for any that hides corn.

Aye! where there's bread there's death—you'll have the roof down on your head, you and your all.

DRUDGE. Ah, what of Grinder, then? 'Ave 'e paid 'is price?

DAFT. A mob of howling men be hunting him; and if they don't find *him*, it's you they'll go for—tear you limb from limb, you and your children—strip you to the shirt.

DRUDGE. Ah, let 'em come. Here's one as they can't hurt. We shall be like 'er soon. It ain't no odds what 'appens then. The Devil's hand and God's be all alike. They've took us, both in turn, and broke us.

(DOTTY DAFT, *looking at the corn sacks, is seized by sudden panic. He retreats hastily to the door.*)

DAFT. Ah! I'll not stop here! They'll burn—they'll burn you for it. (*He runs out. DRUDGE stands looking at the corn sacks. He goes nearer, and looks at them across the table, on which still lie the empty platters and a knife*)

DRUDGE. So that's why you've come here? You've come to kill us, 'ave yer? Oh, no fear, you've found yer way to it. Aye, week after week, there you've been rounding on us, fat and sleek, while we was starving. And when we be dead Grinder 'ull come and claim yer; and when you've fed 'im at 'is price, he'll let yer go—for bread. People 'ull eat yer, rip yer up alive. (*His hand falls on knife*) And put yer in their bellies, for 'im to drive fresh bargains on. D'you think I'll let yer go, now as I've got yer? (*He takes up knife from table*) Ah, I'll let yer know who's master when you takes yer price in blood. (*He rushes at the sacks and starts ripping them open*) Here! Die! Die! Die! Go down into the mud ye come from! Breed your

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maggots, hatch your lice! (*The corn pours out onto the ground*) You be all Grinders—Grinder's got 'is price, 'is price, 'is price!

(*All this time DOLE has sat unmoved by the body of the dead child. Enter GRINDER, out of breath and exhausted.*)

GRINDER. Help! Help! Ah, save me! Hide me! Quick! They're coming, they're coming, coming to kill me—speak, save me! (*DRUDGE stands rigid, not heeding him, the knife still in his hand. Suddenly GRINDER sees the dead child*) What's that?

DRUDGE. It be our child—she's dead. You killed her.

GRINDER. (*Terrified*) No! No!

DRUDGE. That's the price o' bread. *Your* price.

GRINDER. No, no, ah, spare me. If you will, you shall have all this corn, yes, and the mill, the mill! (*Outside, a distant murmur of voices is heard approaching. GRINDER whirls round, looking for a hiding-place. DRUDGE points with his knife*) Get under the corn!

GRINDER. Ah, no, not there, not there! It's corn they're coming for. They'll strip you bare, bare! That won't save me.

DRUDGE. Oh, so that was why you give it me?

GRINDER. No, no, God help me! I——

(*The sound without grows louder. BIT advances to the door and listens. DOLE rises with a strange look of exaltation upon her face; she touches her husband's arm, points to GRINDER, then to the dead child. DRUDGE understands, and bows his head.*)

DRUDGE. You lift her up. (*DOLE raises the body*

from the bed) There, now you get in there.
(*To GRINDER*). We'll cover you.

GRINDER. How? How? With what?

DRUDGE. With her. It's yer last chance. Lie down, lie you down both.

(*GRINDER shrinks fearfully to the bed.*)

GRINDER. Ah, don't betray me. Swear! Give me your oath.

DRUDGE. I'll take no oath—not I. You've got to trust them as you robbed: them as was dirt and dust under your feet—as you kicked to the ditch, and left to rot, while you was getting rich. (*GRINDER starts up suspiciously, believing that DRUDGE means to murder him. The sound without grows louder*) Lie down, you dog! Don't you stir for your life! If you make sign or sound, you'll get this knife stuck in yer guts.

GRINDER. Oh, God! Oh, God!

DRUDGE. Lie still! (*He lies down, they cover him with the body of the dead child. The door is thrown violently open. Enter HUE and CRY, followed presently by STRIKE and other rioters*)

HUE. Ho, there!

CRY. Ho, there!

DRUDGE. Come in. What be your will?

STRIKE. Has any man passed here?

DRUDGE. No one's gone by.

STRIKE. One running for his life? Seen him?

DRUDGE. Not I! Life don't concern us here. Here, on this bed, see for yourself, a little child lies dead.

STRIKE. How did she die?

DRUDGE. Starved. Ain't 'er face a sign?

STRIKE. But you've got corn here.

DRUDGE. Yes, but it's not mine.

STRIKE. You stored it.

DRUDGE. Yes.

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STRIKE. You *fed* on it.

DRUDGE. What—we? Do us look fed? Han't yer got eyes to see?

STRIKE. Who owns the mill?

DRUDGE. Grinder!

HUE. Why, that's the man we're after.

DRUDGE. Oh, well, find him if you can. D'you mean to kill him?

STRIKE. Yes!

DRUDGE. That's well, that's well! For while he lives his soul must be in hell. He's got his price.

(DOLE, *with the inspired face of one prophesying, rises above the body of the dead child. As she speaks, all gaze at her in awe and amazement.*)

DOLE. Hush! Hush! I hear a sound. There's new corn coming—coming through the ground, coming all round the world. There's great strong men reaping it home. Harvest be come again! Waggon and ships be loading, and the breeze be blowing it from the West across the seas. Can't ye hear? Can't ye see? It be all gold. And all the earth be full as it can hold of the Lord's goodness. For His mercy-seat be in men's hearts, and in the hands and feet of them that labor, and the Lord have broke the power of them as laid on us the yoke of our affliction—they as bought and sold the children's bread, and took the price in gold for flesh and blood. Better for them would be a millstone round the neck, and the deep sea to cover 'em.

STRIKE. Sure, she is off her head! Come, let us go. (*Exit STRIKE, HUE, CRY and the rioters*)

DOLE. That's why my child be dead! It be all come from 'ere, she's bought the corn, she's paid the price, that's why my child was born.

DRUDGE. They've gone—they've gone! D'ye hear? (*He approaches the bed*) Man, look alive! Get up—don't lie so still! What, does fear drive blood from the heart like this? (*He lays his hand on*

GRINDER *under the coverlet. His tone changes suddenly*) Lift her away! (DOLE *draws the dead child to one side, disclosing the body of GRINDER*) No use, 'e's got 'is price, 'e's had to pay. Wife, he be dead. (*He takes hold of the body to lift it*)

DOLE.—

There! leave 'em side by side,
Her body would have saved him, but he died
Of his black guilty 'eart. He took the wheat
And kept it; and he killed my child, my sweet.
Nor never said a word, nor made complaint,
Not to the end. Ah! Sure, she was a saint!
For as 'er died, low in 'er 'eart I 'eard
The whispering of the corn, and the true word
Come, and it told me God was everywhere,
In everything, in land, and sea, and air,
Lord of the Harvest—and He heard 'er prayer—
He heard 'er prayer!

CURTAIN.

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